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Marine Corps University
2076 South Street
Marine Corps Combat Development Command
Quantico, VA 22134-5068

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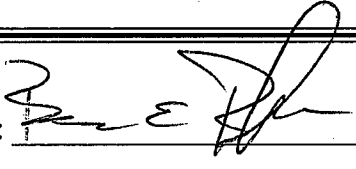
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DEGRADATION OF ARTILLERY SKILLS

AUTHOR:


MAJ TIMOTHY M. SLINGER

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Mentor and Oral Defense Committee Member: 

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Executive Summery

Title: Degradation of Artillery Skills

Author: Major Timothy M. Slinger, United States Marine Corps

Thesis: Continuous non-standard / non-artillery deployments in support of the Global War on Terror (GWOT) conducted by artillery units over the past five years has caused severe degradation of artillery skills and the ability to fire accurate and predicted fires.

Discussion: Over the past five years the American war machine that drove Saddam Husain from power has transitioned into a force that must contend with an insurgency that originally they were not prepared for. Fire and maneuver and combined arms doctrine gave way to Counter-Insurgency Operations (COIN). This transition has required the Marine Corps to react to shortfalls with manning requirements for missions they are unaccustomed. They filled those shortfalls by creating "provisional" missions and Individual Augments (IA) that have generally been filled by the artillery community. The majority of the active duty battalions have deployed in support of OIF as one of those provisional missions conducting convoy operations, infantry operations, running detention centers, or providing site security. The loss of personnel to transition teams and individual augment billets to fill Marine Expeditionary Force (MEF) and Division staffs in addition to batteries and battalions deploying in a non-artillery role has caused a focus shift within the community. The lack of focused core artillery training has left the Artillery Community with the inability to properly execute the combined arms doctrine that annihilated the Iraqi army in 2003.

Conclusion: In order to regain the capability of accurate, predicted fire and properly incorporate artillery into the doctrine of fire and maneuver the focus of training needs to shift back to conventional training and prepare for high-intensity conflict. The artillery regiments must have relief from the continuous support of personnel to transition teams and individual augment billets for higher headquarters staffs in order to retain senior enlisted and officers that are vital for training junior Marines. The Marine Corps also must deploy battalions in support of Regimental Combat Teams to retain a vital relationship and give the Regimental Commander the fire support expertise that is found at the battalion level not at the battery level.

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Preface

In spite of the obvious reason for writing this paper, which is to graduate the Command and Staff College with a Masters in Military Studies, I am truly concerned about the amount of atrophy within our community over the past several years. After numerous conversations with Battalion and Regimental Commanders, senior enlisted, and colleagues within the artillery I have grown concerned with the future of the artillery's ability to perform even the most basic of artillery missions.

As a career artillerist, I have had the pleasure of performing virtually all positions within the artillery battery. As a forward observer I was able to observe numerous artillery rounds during regimental desert fire exercises and have had the privilege of working with 3rd Light Armored Reconnaissance Company and a Liaison to the Royal Netherlands Marine Corps. As a Fire Direction Officer, I had the opportunity to fire a five gun battery during several battery level exercises at Camp Pendleton, CA and Marine Corps Air, Ground, Combat Center (MCAGCC) in 29 Palms, CA. As the battalion S-3A, Assistant Operations Officer and Battalion Fire Direction Officer, I had the great privilege of preparing and controlling the battalion with a total of sixteen howitzers as we supported a tank battalion during a combined arms exercise.

I did not have a true appreciation of artillery until I became a gunnery instructor at the Field Artillery training center Fort Sill, OK. Training lieutenants the fundamentals of artillery allowed me to gain a deeper understanding of the complicated science and math that allows it to be deadly accurate. The appreciation deepened in 2005 as I was giving the great opportunity to command Bravo Battery, First Battalion, Tenth Marines deploying to Okinawa, Japan in support of the Unit Deployment Program. But it was my position as first battalion's operations officer

that I came to understand the magnitude of degradation that has been caused by the continuous provisional deployments and transition team requirements.

In the eighteen months as an operations officer, I was only able to control the battalion in an artillery firing exercise once. Even then we only were able to train with one battery manning two howitzers. The other two batteries were supporting the global war on terrorism in a non-artillery mission. The remainder of my time was spent assisting other battalions training for GWOT missions aboard Fort Polk, LA and training my battalion for a deployment as Task Force Military Police.

This project was an arduous task and before I proceed with any findings, I will need to give thanks to several individuals. First and foremost I appreciate the staff of the Marine Corps' Command and Staff College, particularly Dr. Bruce Bechtol and COL Stephen Cherry, USA for their patience, flexibility, professional advice, and understanding. I would also like to give thanks to LtCol Michael McCarthy and Col Peter Keating, my former Battalion Commanders at First Battalion, Tenth Marines. Even with my stubbornness they were able to drive into me the importance of a staff officer at the field grade level and their function in the Marine Corps. I also give my deepest appreciating to Col Larry Holcomb, Commanding Officer, 11th Marines, LtCol Timothy Parker, former Commanding Officer 2nd Battalion, 10th Marines and LtCol Scott Lacy, Artillery program manager at PP&O HQMC; their insight, and artillery experience and quality information collaborated into the completion of this project. It is with great appreciation that I give to retired Master Gunnery Sergeant (MGySgt) Nicholas for his truthful and candid nature. I must also give thanks to Master Sergeant (MSgt) Jackson, my former Operations Chief who kept me out of trouble during our deployment in support of OIF 06-08.

Lastly, but the most important I would like to thank my lovely wife, Kimberly, and my two wonderful children, Thomas and Brennon. Their love and support has been a driving factor for my success throughout my career. I am forever indebted to their patience, strength, and understanding during many long hours and deployments. I can only pray that my life continues to be enriched with them in it.

Introduction

In 2003 the world watched as I MEF applied their doctrine of maneuver warfare against the Iraqi regime during Operation IRAQI FREEDOM (OIF). The doctrine was based on overwhelming combined arms using air support and indirect fire, provided by the 11th Marine Regiment, and with 1st Battalion, 10th Marines (who had been deployed in direct support of Task Force Tarawa). The 11th Marine Regiment fired just short of 20,000 rounds of artillery ammunition¹ and researchers have seen that the “spectacular use of integration of fires and maneuver was a crucial part of the success that unseated Saddam Husain and freed the people of Iraq”.² Over the course of the campaign, the 155mm howitzer proved to be the only all-weather capable fire support platform. This success can be directly related to the professionalism, *capability*, flexibility, and *depth of experience* of the artilleryman that planned, fired, and integrated the weapon into the combined arms doctrine.³

Over the past five years, the American war machine that drove Saddam Husain from power has transitioned into a force contending with an insurgency that originally they were not prepared for. Fire and maneuver, and combined arms doctrine gave way to Counter-Insurgency Operations (COIN). This transition has required the Marine Corps to react to shortfalls with manning requirements for missions they are unaccustomed. They filled those shortfalls by creating “provisional” missions that have generally been filled by the artillery community forcing the commanders of the three active duty regiments and battalions to become a force provider.⁴ As stated by LtCol Grice, “Artillerists of the 10th, 11th, and 12th Regiments, found that they were no longer employing their units as Marine Corps doctrine postulated, but instead were the well of souls that provided personnel and units, up to Battalion strength, for any and all nonstandard missions that were required by Headquarters Marine Corps (HQMC).⁵

To date, 8 of 10 active duty battalions have deployed (at least one time) to Iraq in a provisional role. They have run detention centers, provided convoy escort, served as military police, conducted infantry operations, manned ground movement control centers, provided fixed site and mobile security elements, and have performed Civil Military Affairs.⁶ Those ongoing missions have caused the artillery community to lose focus on their primary mission of firing accurate, predicted fire in support of maneuver elements.

The continuous deployments in support of the Global War on Terrorism (GWOT) has giving the community a generation of Marines (both officer and enlisted) that have spent as little as 1/3 of their first tour conducting artillery training. We are seeing Second Lieutenants deploy with a battery as a military police platoon commander and once return spend four to five months learning their craft to be told to prepare for a tour as a member of a transition team. The Marine Corps is not alone in this endeavor, as the Army is suffering as well. In a white letter addressed to the Chief Staff of the Army by three former Brigade Commanders stated that no other branch in the Army "has suffered a greater identity crises than the Field Artillery, as a result of transformation, COIN-centric operations, and non-standard manpower demands of OIF / OEF."⁷

As in the Army Field Artillery Branch, which has been described as "Dead Branch Walking,"⁸; the Marine Corps Artillery is also suffering this same identity crises and with each passing month we are letting perishable skills atrophy. As stated in that same report, "we are mortgaging not only flexibility in today's fight, but our ability to fight the next war as well"⁹

The artillery community must find a way to combat the current trend of degradation in conjunction with meeting the requirements of current COIN operations. By swinging the pendulum back to conventional training, and allowing the artillery community to focus on the our artillery Mission Essential Task List (METL); the Marines of the 08xx field artillery

community will be in a position to execute existing missions in both OIF and OEF as well as prepare for future conflicts.

Origins

The atrophy of Military Occupational Specialty (MOS) skills that the artillery community is facing can be traced back to the end of combat operations after the initial invasion of operations IRAQI FREEDOM in 2003. After firing 19,883 rounds timely and accurately the 11th Marines Regiment, in support of 1st Marine Division (1MARDIV) transitioned (along with their adjacent Regiments) into Stability and Support Operations (SASO).¹⁰ By 11 April 1st Battalion, 11th Marines (1/11) and 3rd Battalion, 11th Marines (3/11) were inside the city of Baghdad and had established the Divisions Civil Military Operations Center (CMOC). Once the Regiment entered the city, several days later, the southeast quadrant was assigned to them to conduct SASO. In addition, the regiment was to continue the responsibility as the Divisions Civil Military Operations.

Not a common job for an artilleryman, the Regiment took on the new role of Civil Military Operations with the same force as they had when the initial invasion took place. The Regimental Commander was giving the title of Civil Military Operations Coordinator for 1MARDIV. The Regimental Commander quickly established two CMOC sites, one in the regiment's zone of action and the other in the Palestine hotel closer to downtown where he would control Civil Military Operations for the Division. His daily routine was not coordinating artillery fires or planning timelines, he spent his days (along with his staff) coordinating with Regimental Combat Team (RCT) Commanders, Civic Leaders, Non-Governmental Officials (NGOs), and former Iraqi Government Officials.¹¹ In the Regiments zone, 1/11 and 3/11 were

quickly quieting the residence down and assuring them that the Marines were there to help them and not occupy. By conducting daily patrols, removing weapons caches, and detaining looters the battalions were able to make the city a safer place then when they arrived.¹²

Besides SASO duties the regiment also aided the Division in many other ways that took them away from their artillery MOS. The regiment provided security forces to guard and secure key locations within the city. In addition they provided personnel to key leaders for their personnel security detachments (PSD), this ensured their safety as those key leaders travelled around the Divisions Area of Operations (AO). Since they had the logistical capability the Regiment partnered with the Marine Logistical Group (MLG) to aid in the delivery of over 55,000 gallons of water across the Divisions AO.¹³

Once the Regiment returned to Camp Pendleton they began to turn their focus away from SASO to the more familiar artillery operations, but this was not to last long. For a six to seven month time period the Regiment was able to support Combined Arms Exercises (CAX) and various battalion live fire exercises. The Regimental live fire exercise, scheduled for September of 2003, was cancelled due to large grass fires in the Camp Pendleton impact area which caused them to transition to a Command Post Exercise (CPX). Once the division received orders back Iraq to in support of OIF II, the planning became the regiment's priority. STEEL KNIGHT, a large scale combined arms exercise in the first week of December, was cancelled as all elements of the Division waited further guidance.¹⁴ With exercises cancelling and grass fires in the impact area, the 11th Marine Regiment was ordered to support OIF II, not as an artillery firing unit but as a force provider.

Upon receiving orders, preparing the Marines to deploy became the regiment's primary effort. Third Battalion, Eleventh Marines (3/11) was to create a 1000 man task force to become

the first of many provisional Military Police Battalions, with other Marines prepared to deploy to augment the Division Fire Support Coordination Center (FSCC) and the Civil Affairs Cell. The Regiment also deployed their radar detachments to counter the indirect fire threat in theater. All units deployed approximately February 2004.¹⁵

On the east coast, the Tenth Marine Regiment was faring better because they were not a part of the original invasion nor were they a huge part of OIF II. Yet, they did have their share of support missions. In January 2004, 10th Marines received orders to deploy an Artillery Battalion as a provisional infantry unit. 2nd Battalion, 10th Marines (2/10) deployed in July of 2004 and conducted convoy operations and border / site security within the Marines Corps assigned AO taking with them Battery C, Battery E, Battery F, Battery L, and their HQ battery.¹⁶

After the deployment of 2nd Battalion, 10th Marines, Camp Lejuene was relatively quiet as they did not have huge commitments during OIF II besides supporting various individual augment (IA) billets but was torn apart when 2nd Marine Expeditionary Force (II MEF) was assigned to command the Marine forces in theater for OIF III in 2005. 3rd Battalion, 10th Marines (3/10) and 5th Battalion, 10th Marines (5/10) reconfigured to support IA requirements at the II MEF and 2nd Marine Division (2MARDIV) staffs and formations of Military Transition Teams (MiTT) to support and teach the Iraqi Army proper tactics, techniques, and procedures. 1st Battalion, 10th Marines was also ordered to deploy, again not as an artillery battalion, but as the lead agency in Iraqi Security Force (ISF) development cell and PSD for key leaders on the MEF and division staffs.¹⁷

In their 2006 Command Chronology, period covering 1 January to 30 June, the 10th Marine Regiments primary focus was clearly stated, "training, equipping, and deploying units and individual augments (IA's) in support of the Global War on Terrorism (GWOT)...Second,

was retraining individuals and units in MOS specific standards and Mission Essential Tasks (METs) after redeployment from non-traditional missions.”¹⁸ In the beginning of that same year, substantial elements of two Battalion Headquarters were deployed in non-traditional roles. First Battalion and Fifth Battalion were deployed not as artillery battalions processing fires or coordinating fires, they were chopped up supporting different elements of the MEF and division. Many were on the roles of the Division and MEF staff as IA, while others were filling billets in RCTs FSCC (primarily processing non-kinetic fires). In addition to providing PSD for key leaders and commanders the Marines of those Battalions were coordinating ISF development.¹⁹ The Regiment also deployed two battery’s independent of any artillery battalion for a provisional infantry company mission to secure and defend the Ports of Entry (POE) along the Syrian and Saudi Arabian borders. When the year was completed, the regiment deployed three out of four battalions equaling over 40 officers and Staff Non-Commissioned Officers (SNCO) as individual augments in support of MiTTs and staff requirements.²⁰

The primary focus of supporting the GWOT did not stop at the end of 2006. The following year found 10th Marine Regiment deploying 5th Battalion, 10th Marines (5/10) as Civil Military Operations (CMO) Task Force for one year. First Battalion, Tenth Marines (1/10) deployed as Task Force Military Police (TFMP) with three artillery batteries (one being a reserve battery from 5th Battalion, 14th Marines), an augmented reserve Light Armored Recovery (LAR) Company and the Battalion headquarters battery. In addition the Regiment deployed 2nd Battalion, 10th Marines (2/10) for a six months as Camp Commandant and security force for Camp Fallujah. In 2008, 3/10 relieved 1/10 as TFMP only one year after returning from their previous mission.

The 11th Marines also had their share of non-traditional missions from OIF II to present day. They deployed 2/11 in the summer of 2004 to relieve 3/11 as the provisional MP Battalion (that mission would stay in the artillery community being passed to 5/14, then 1/12, 1/10, 3/10, back to 1/12 for the current timeframe).²¹ The year of 2005 gave some relieve as they transitioned to the M777 lightweight howitzer but still supported the GWOT with numerous IA and Transition Team members. In 2006, the Regiments constant support of GWOT did not slow down deploying over 85 Officers and SNCOs in support of IA and Transition Teams billets in addition to deploying several battery's as provisional MP Company's. They also formed truck platoons to deploy with 2nd Battalion, 7th Marines (2/7), 1st Battalion, 3rd Marines (1/3), 3rd Battalion, 5th Marines (3/5), and 1st Battalion, 1st Marines (1/1). The deployments of IA billets continually affected the command structure of the regiment as they were understaffed more the majority of the year.²² Unfortunately the non-traditional missions did not stop in 2007 as 1/11 deployed as a security force during OIF 06-08.2 and 2/11 replaced 5/10 as CMO Task Force.²³

With five years of non-traditional mission, IA and Transition Team billets becoming the primary focus of the Regiments and MOS training a far second the affects can be felt across the spectrum of the community.

Effect of five years of supporting non-traditional roles

In the article, "Resuscitating the King," in the October 2008 issue of the *Marine Corps Gazette*, Maj Michael Grice explores the notion of the atrophy within the artillery community over the past five years supporting provisional missions and deploying IA to support MEF staffs and Transition Teams. His thesis for that work can be summed into one statement: after five

years of supporting provisional missions the “result has been the capability of Marine artillery to serve as the preeminent fires element has faded to the point of operation oblivion.”²⁴

The concern with atrophy within the artillery community has also been echoed by Master Gunnery Sergeant (MGySgt) (Ret) Nicholas, former 10th Marine Regiment Field Artillery Chief (FAC), in an interview conducted in Dec of 2008. He explained that the “results of the GWOT non-artillery missions have had a near disastrous affect on the artillery prowess.”²⁵ He continued to explain that the Regiment continuously fought against Division, MEF, and Headquarters Marine Corps (HQMC) requirements to source provisional missions and still maintain the ability to conduct the artillery METL. The concern has not stopped and has been felt up and down the chain of command. A HQMC quarterly readiness board was directed to substantiate the claim in late 2007. Their first priority was to establish the state of the atrophy or if there is a crises at all, to do this they issued a series of questions (see appendix A) aimed at the Regiments and Battalions to determine if there is an atrophy crises and what could potentially be done to correct it. Although the majority of the report and responses have been classified, I was able to receive two unclassified responses. Both of the Battalion Commanders agreed that the continuous provisional missions have severally degraded the readiness of an Artillery Battalion. This degradation not only includes the 08xx MOS of field artillery (such as Fire Direction, Gunline procedures, Fire Support), but also has affected the community across the full spectrum of capability. According to their responses the degradation has affected motor transport, communication, and logistics.²⁶

The negative effect of continuous provisional missions has also been seen by personnel working at the Tactical Training and Exercise Control Group (TTECG) in 29 Palms, CA. In a report submitted by the Senior Fire Support representative (Coyote 22) to the Commanding

Officer, Marine Detachment, Ft Sill, OK sites nine different firing incidences and numerous negative trends that are a direct result of the provisional missions conducted over the past five years.²⁷ The intent of the report, submitted on 18 August 2008, is to provide feedback to all Artillery Regimental Commanding Officers on the firing battery performances over a six month time period. Of the nine firing incidents reports, seven of those were a direct result of miss procedures within the Fire Direction Center, while the other two were gunline mistakes. Additional trends were also mentioned in the report that substantiates a claim to MOS degradation:

- a. Missing TOT in executing schedules of fires and CFF missions when the battery is provided sufficient time to execute the mission. The TTECG recommended TTP for setting TOT is still 10 minutes.
- b. Firing batteries are often unable to consistently meet the T&R Standard of 1 min when shifting from one target to the next in a schedules of fires.
- c. Artillery FO and Scout Observer CFF procedures consistently do not adhere to the standards established within the MCWP 3-16.6. FO proficiency in target location has degraded.
- d. Firing battery FDCs have some difficulty in computing data for placing artillery illumination on the deck as a mark for close air support.
- e. Firing batteries are often outside T&R standards when applying corrections to an adjust fire mission. The batteries are taking in excess of 4-6 min to process a correction²⁸

The overall assessment of the report noted that “fire direction accuracy, FDC battle drill, fire mission processing, and battery gunline procedures are all suffering as a result of the varied, ongoing OIF commitments the artillery community is facing in support of the Global War on Terrorism.”²⁹ The report specifically mentioned Forward Observer procedures and target location as serious areas of concern; noting that the procedures and skills within those two areas are degraded as a direct result of inexperienced Liaison Officers (LNO) and chiefs who are unable to properly give guidance to maneuver units on the capabilities of artillery.³⁰

Loss of key personnel and Marines

MGySgt (ret) Nicholas argues the artillery experience will continue to degrade if the community does not stop or at least slow the provisional missions' deployments and the IA / MiTT deployments. He argues that junior Marines (Private to Lance Corporal) only artillery experience is what they learned at the artillery training school in Ft Sill, OK but have multiple GWOT non-standard deployments all within their first three years of service. He continues to explain that Non-Commissioned Officers (NCOs) (Corporal – Sergeant) have spent less than one-third of their service time (traditionally 4 – 6 years) within their MOS. The majority of their time being served in GWOT non-traditional missions.³¹ It is his belief that the deathblow to the community could potentially be the loss of SNCO leadership for continuous transition team and IA deployments.³² His experience and time in the regiment has shown him that transition teams have the highest deployment tempo and that SNCO's are deploying on back to back non-standard missions.³³ In an attempt to curb this and allow SNCOs the ability to regain their MOS knowledge, 10th Marine Regiment began deploying SNCOs returning to the Fleet Marine Force (FMF) from their B-Billet (such as recruiting or recruit training depots). This has had another negative effect on those SNCO's as they are out of their MOS for up to four to five years. Overall the SNCOs are missing critical experience due to non-standard deployments and IA billets which is affecting their ability to teach junior Marines. As expressed by MGySgt (ret) Nicholas, the requirement of the SNCO is to "know your stuff, train your Marines. If the former is missing the latter proves impossible."³⁴

The loss of key personnel to IA billets and TTs is also expressed by the two battalion commanders in their responses to the HQMC Quarterly Readiness Board. They stated that the loss of key personnel in the officer and SNCO ranks to continuous IA and TT billets in addition

to provisional missions have caused a ripple effect within the Battalion staff. In order to fill gaps left, they needed to fill billets such as the Logistics Officer (S-4) and the Operations Officer (S-3) with junior, less experienced Marines.³⁵ First Battalion experienced this first hand in 2006 and 2007 as they were required to fill transition team and higher headquarters staff requirements. The logistics officer (S-4), normally a Captains billet, was filled by a newly promoted first lieutenant with less than two years of fleet experience.

The constant back to back non-artillery deployments of Battery's and Battalions in addition to the loss of key personnel due to IA and TT billets that have a priority over all other training have had a serious affect on the community. We are seeing an entire generation of artilleryman who know very little about their Marine Occupational Specialty (MOS). The loss of skill is echoed by Col Holcomb, Commanding Officer 11th Marines, stating "these requirements have diminished the skills from the individual level up to the regimental level for our artillery specific MOS's (0802, 0811, 0848/44, 0861)."³⁶ As described by Maj Grice in his article, "if we continue to fill provisional missions with artillery units it will potentially place future battery, battalions, and regiments in the position of being commanded (lead) by captains, lieutenant Colonels, and colonels with a level of experience that is far below what is expected for an officer at that position."³⁷

Training spent relearning vice improving

The loss of key MOS skills is not the result of the deployment alone; it is the combination of the pre-deployment work-ups, the deployment, and the post-deployment retraining. The combination of those three timeframes cause the MOS skills to be shelved for much longer than the just the seven or twelve month deployment to Iraq. As one Battalion Commander explained, "on many occasions Marines redeploy from OIF provisional missions and spend approximately a

month on warrior transition and leave, then have four to five months to become proficient in his MOS only to be told on the sixth month to begin Pre-deployment Training Program (PTP) for a MiTT or PiTT assignment.”³⁸

When asked the question regarding the time it takes a unit to regain MOS proficiency, MGySgt (ret) Nicholas stated a window of two to four months have to be dedicated for a battery to have the ability to fire artillery rounds safely.³⁹ He caveated that the safe firing would be without the worry of combined arms integration. A reminder, that it was the combined arms integration and fire and maneuver doctrine which allowed the majority of the success by the Marine Corps in 2003. MGySgt Nicholas continued by stating the battery would need approximately eight to twelve months in order to successfully pass a Training and Readiness (T&R) evaluation.⁴⁰ Of course, that time could be cut in half if the battery had limited distractions and its leadership, SNCO and Officers, were retained for the entire time period. As in the previous discussion, the SNCOs and Offices are constantly in a state of movement as they prepare for PCS, or IA billets and Transition Team assignments. He also elaborated a timeline for a Battalions ability to regain MOS proficiency. He suggested that a time window of twelve to eighteen months would need to be established in order to become proficient to successfully pass a T&R evaluation. Again this would be with limited distractions and key SNCO and officer leadership retained.⁴¹

An example of how lack of focused training time can be shown with 1st Battalion, 10th Marines as they prepared, deployed and returned from the assignment of a provisional MP Battalion in support of OIF 06-08.2 (Sept 2007 – Mar 2008). After receiving the mission in January 2007, the staff quickly began to plan for the deployment by contacting the current unit conducting the mission and identifying the supporting units. The planning was in conjunction

with artillery training at both the battery and battalion levels. The battalion fired the last artillery round in April during a battalion controlled exercise with C Battery who was only able to man two howitzers due to lack of personnel. April to Sept 2007 was filled with pre-deployment training exercises / requirements and annual training requirements in order to ensure 1000+ Marines were prepared for their time in theater. After a successful deployment, the battalion returned in March 2008 with almost a year away from artillery training, but the battalion would need to wait longer before they were able to fire their first round. The unit took post-deployment leave and warrior transition in April and mandatory artillery refresher training in June. It was not until after the July 4th Holiday that 1st Battalion, 10th Marines fired an artillery round since April 2007.⁴²

First Battalion, Twelve Marines had similar MOS training time constraints as they returned from their provisional MP battalion mission in Sept 2007. After receiving word that they would deploy again as Task Force Military Police in February 2008 they dedicated several members of their staff to planning for that deployment, while others concentrated on re-gaining MOS proficiency. In Sept 2008, the Battalion stopped artillery training after less than a year and put their primary focus toward preparing their subordinate units for the provisional mission.⁴³

Yet another example is 2nd Battalion, 10th Marines training, deployment, and redeployment from their Civil Military Operations (CMO) mission supporting OIF FY08. The battalion did not touch their howitzers for a period of two years. The Marines training time was focused in CMO not firing and more importantly coordinating artillery. Those Marines, particularly officers and SNCO's, will not receive and significant artillery time during their tour in the operating forces.⁴⁴

In order to stop the atrophy, the HQMC needs to stop or slow the provisional missions and IA billets in order to allow the artillery community the time to regain their artillery skill set. As previously mentioned the Artillery Battalions and Regiments need their personnel and training time with little distractions. This would allow the artilleryman to strike a balance between conventional warfare and irregular or COIN operations.

Battalion level training and fire support coordination

A third area that has affected the atrophy of the artillery community is the deployment of batteries without their parent commands. Since there is little need for artillery during COIN operations, artillery firing batteries were deployed in support of regimental combat teams (RCT's) vice a battalion. In accordance with doctrine, artillery battalions support regiments in a direct support, general support, or general support-reinforcing role. The battalion is used due to the amount of firepower it can bring to the regiment and more importantly the amount of advice and expertise it can bring.

In his response to the HQMC quarterly board questionnaire, one Battalion Commander answered the focus of training is on deploying batteries independent of their parent battalions. He continuous to explain that the battalions are not "being employed as a part of a Marine, Air, Ground, Task Force (MAGTF) and training to support combined arms operations."⁴⁵ As explained in earlier sections their primary focus has been preparing batteries to deploy or providing personnel for IA and TT requirements. When battalions do deploy, their missions are provisional and non-artillery, such as Task Force Military Police or camp security.

The lack of battalion level artillery training has caused the community's ability to conduct fire support coordination has been severely degraded. Col Holcomb exemplifies this by the following statement, "the greatest area that has been diminished is in our ability to conduct

fire support coordination in support of maneuver from the company up to the division levels, which is a corner stone of our ability as a MAGTF to be successful.”⁴⁶

Preparing for the future: *fighting the war we are in*

After five years of COIN operations the artillery community can no longer stand idly by and watch their MOS skills continue to degrade. They must be prepare for future high intensity conflict and regain those combined armed integration skills that were so successful during the OIF invasion in 2003. The Marine Corps must re-evaluate the amount of transition team requirements in order to reduce the number of deployed personnel. Provisional missions must also stop or be reduced in order to allow for traditional training. But we must be careful, as we cannot afford for the pendulum swing too far back to conventional training and preparation, we must learn from past mistakes, and focus on preparing for the future fight as well as executing the missions of the current one. As Robert Gates states in his Joint Forces Quarterly article, “we currently strive for balance between doing everything we can to prevail in the conflicts we are in, and being prepared for other contingencies that might arise elsewhere or in the future.”⁴⁷

As explained by LtCol McCarthy, current Battalion Commander of 1st Battalion, 10th Marines, the atrophy has been acknowledged and 10th Marines is seeing a decrease in the number of provisional missions and transition team requirements.⁴³ This was echoed by LtCol Scott Lacy, the artillery representative at HQMC Plans, Policies, and Operations (PP&O) Branch, when asked if HQMC is aware of the significant degradation caused by the continuous provisional missions. He also mentioned that an artillery panel with participants from 10th Marines, 14th Marines, Artillery Detachment Ft Sill, OK, and HQMC met in Dallas, TX to discuss the artillery’s role in the current and future conflicts. Although the meeting was a closed

door session and was hesitant in discussing any outcomes as it is unpublished and has not been reviewed by top officials, LtCol Lacy did hint at swinging the pendulum back to conventional training; but cautioned that the artillery community must always be prepared to do what the Marine Corps needs it to accomplish.⁴⁹

The urgency of stopping any more degradation is relevant and paramount at all levels of the military. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates quotes in his article published in Joint Forces Quarterly, "As a result of the demands of Afghanistan and Iraq, ground forces have not been able to stay proficient in specialties such as field artillery... We must remedy this situation as soon as we can through growing the ground forces, and increasing dwell time and opportunities for full-spectrum training."⁵⁰

History has proven that if the focus of training is one-sided, such as the Marine Corps in focusing on the OIF COIN fight, then the affects can be disastrous. An example can be learned from the Israeli military during their battle with Hezbollah in the summer of 2006 in southern Lebanon. While Hezbollah fought with conventional tactics such as small infantry squads centered on machine guns, mortars, and anti-tank missiles, the Israeli army conventional tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs) had atrophied after years of fighting a counterinsurgency fight in the Palestine territories.⁵¹ On the other side, the British army forgot about continued training a conventional force after World War I. They transitioned to a police force to protect their Empire. As a result they were almost overmatched by the power and conventional force of the German army in 1940.⁵²

The past five years, the military has been COIN focused. Our training at all levels exemplifies this focus. To turn this tide and prevent further degradation training has to become more conventional. Mojave Viper, the Marine Corps' culminating training exercise for

deploying units, must be revised to incorporate the artillery. Not just to provide fires, but work in conjunction with a maneuver unit. The battery and battalions must be given the opportunity to practice the art of shooting, moving, and communicating.

The Marine Corps must also stop the independent battery deployments without their parent commands. This will allow the pendulum to shift and strike a balance of preparing for future conflict and winning the current struggle. The pendulum, which seems to be stuck on irregular, unconventional, COIN-centric environment, needs to be shifted. The extreme focus on COIN has caused degradation of artillery skills we cannot afford to lose. We have proven the ability to adapt to provisional missions. We must now be given time and personnel to regain our core competency.

Conclusion

In the past three years, the 11th Marine Regiment alone has deployed 1st Battalion for ten months as a security force taken with them three artillery firing batteries and a headquarters element. Second Battalion deployed as a Civil Affairs cell for twelve as well as deploying two separate firing batteries as Military Police Company's in support of Task Force MP. Third Battalion was assigned to deploy in 2009 as Task Force MP, but was transitioned to an artillery specific mission to support Second Marine Expeditionary Brigade (2MEB) in Afghanistan. Third Battalions deployment to perform artillery specific tasks will be the first since OIF in 2003.⁵³

The batteries that have deployed to perform artillery specific missions in support of OIF have done everything but fire artillery. With the increase of COIN operations those batteries have been tasked to provide convoy / EOD escort, man checkpoints, and provide route

reconnaissance. Those Marines that did man a howitzer did not shoot, move, or communicate; they were stable on a secure forward operating base.⁵⁴

In just 11th Marines alone, those deployments equate to over 50% of the regiment deployed for provisional, non-artillery missions over the past three years. In addition the IA and TT requirements levied on the regiment have added an additional 17% to those deployed personnel.⁵⁵ That is 67% of the regiment not performing, practicing, training, coordinating, or firing artillery. The effect is that basic artillery skills are diminishing.

The Marine Corps must stop the continuous requirements for transition teams and allow higher headquarters staffs to deploy with few personnel. This would allow those officers and SNCOs to remain in the artillery battalions to learn and perfect their job. It takes six months to teach a second lieutenant artillery at Ft Sill, without performing the job daily the skill will degrade and become harder to execute. The provisional missions must be passed to other communities or allow those, such as a military police company, to execute the job of convoy security. HQMC also must cancel those provisional missions, such as TFMP that are not needed. This would allow battalions to concentrate on conducting artillery training. Lastly, when RCTs do deploy, HQMC should allow a Battalion to deploy in support.

The artillery community understands the need for provisional missions. They have stepped into that role and performed exceptionally. It is now time to allow those Marines to regain and perfect their core competency. As General Conway states in the Marine Corps vision and Strategy 2025, "it is our obligation to subsequent generations of Marines, and to our Nation, to always have an eye to the future – to prepare for tomorrow's challenges today."⁵⁶ With the current state of artillery, are we meeting that obligation?

Notes

¹ Michael D. Gice "Resuscitating the King." *Marine Corps Gazette*, Volume 92, Issue 10 (Oct 2008):

<http://proquest.umi.com/pqdweb?did=1575093371&Fmt=4&clientId=32176&RQT=309&VName=PQD>.

²Ibid

³Ibid

⁴Ibid

⁵Ibid

⁶Ibid

⁷ Col Sean MacFarland, USA; Col Michael Shields, USA and Col Jeffrey Snow, USA. "The King and I: The Impending Crises in the Field Artillery's ability to provide Fire Support to Maneuver Commanders." White Letter addressed to CSA.

⁸Ibid

⁹Ibid

¹⁰ Michael R. Mellilo "Cannon Cockers at War: The 11th Marines in Operation IRAQI FREEDOM." *Field Artillery*, Issue 5 (Sept / Oct 2003): 24-27.

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¹¹Ibid

¹²Ibid

¹³Ibid

¹⁴ Headquarters, United States Marine Corps, "11th Marines Command Chronology: period covering 1 Jul – 31 Dec 2003." Archives and Special Collections Branch, Collection.

¹⁵Ibid

¹⁶ Headquarters, United States Marine Corps, "10th Marines Command Chronology: period covering 1 Jan – 30 Jun 2005." Archives and Special Collections Branch, Collection.

¹⁷Ibid

¹⁸ Headquarters, United States Marine Corps, "10th Marines Command Chronology: period covering 1 Jan – 30 Jun 2006." Archives and Special Collections Branch, Collection.

¹⁹Ibid

²⁰Ibid

²¹ Headquarters, United States Marine Corps, "11th Marines Command Chronology: period covering 1 Jan – 30 Jun 2004." Archives and Special Collections Branch, Collection.

²² Headquarters, United States Marine Corps, "11th Marines Command Chronology: period covering 1 Jan – 30 Jun 2004." Archives and Special Collections Branch, Collection. and Headquarters, United States Marine Corps, "11th Marines Command Chronology: period covering 1 Jul – 31 Dec 2004." Archives and Special Collections Branch, Collection.

²³ Headquarters, United States Marine Corps, "11th Marines Command Chronology: period covering 1 Jan – 30 Jun 2007." Archives and Special Collections Branch, Collection .

²⁴Grice, Michael D. "Resuscitating the King." *Marine Corps Gazette*, Volume 92, Issue 10 (Oct 2008): 20-24.
<http://proquest.umi.com/pqdweb?did=1575093371&Fmt=4clientId=32176&RQT=309&VName=PQD>.

²⁵MGySgt (Ret) Nicholas, email message to author, 18 December 2008. MGySgt Nicholas was the 10th Marine Regiment Field Artillery Chief (FAC) from August 2005 to December 2008. He is the senior 0811 Cannoneer within the regiment and advises the Regimental Commander on all Battery / Battalion operations. An additional duty of the FAC is to become the SNCOIC of the Regimental Field Artillery School and be responsible for all artillery training to include MOS retraining within the regiment.

²⁶Michael McCarthy. "Core Competency Degradation." Naval Correspondence Letter responding to Study conducted by HQMC April Quarterly Readiness Board, DTD 28 Jan 2008 and T.M. Parker. "Core Competency Degradation." Naval Correspondence Letter responding to Study conducted by HQMC April Quarterly Readiness Board, DTD 11 Feb 2008.

²⁷J.D. Goodell, "TTECG Artillery Firing Semi-Annual Incident and Trends Report for Exercise Mojave Viper 2008 (Jan – Jul)." Naval Correspondence Ltr, DTD 31 Aug 2008, to Commanding Officer, Marine Artillery Detachment, Ft Sill, OK.

²⁸Ibid

²⁹Ibid

³⁰Ibid

³¹MGySgt (Ret) Nicholas, email message to author, 18 December 2008.

³²Ibid

³³Ibid

³⁴Ibid

³⁵Michael McCarthy. "Core Competency Degradation." Naval Correspondence Letter responding to Study conducted by HQMC April Quarterly Readiness Board, DTD 28 Jan 2008 and T.M. Parker. "Core Competency Degradation." Naval Correspondence Letter responding to Study conducted by HQMC April Quarterly Readiness Board, DTD 11 Feb 2008.

³⁶Col Larry Holcomb, USMC, Commanding Officer 11th Marine Regiment, 1st Marine Division. Email message to author, 24 March 2009.

³⁷Grice, Michael D. "Resuscitating the King." *Marine Corps Gazette*, Volume 92, Issue 10 (Oct 2008): 20-24.
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³⁸Michael McCarthy. "Core Competency Degradation." Naval Correspondence Letter responding to Study conducted by HQMC April Quarterly Readiness Board, DTD 28 Jan 2008

³⁹MGySgt (Ret) Nicholas, email message to author, 18 December 2008.

⁴⁰Ibid

⁴¹Ibid

⁴²Authors personnel experience as Operations Officer 1/10 from August 2006 through June 2008.

⁴³Authors continuous conversations with 1/12 Operations Officer, Maj Josh Gelerter

⁴⁴Col Larry Holcomb.

⁴⁵LtCol Parker

⁴⁶Col Larry Holcomb

⁴⁷Robert M. Gates. "The National Defense Strategy: Striking the Right Balance." *Joint Forces Quarterly*, 1st Quarter 2009, Issue 52: 2

⁴⁸LtCol McCarthy, Battalion Commander 1st Battalion, 10th Marines: April 2007 – Present, email interview with author, 21 Jan 2009.

⁴⁹LtCol Scott Lacy, interview with author on 1 Feb 2009.

⁵⁰Robert Gates: page 4

⁵¹ Gian P. Gentile. "Let's build an Army to win all wars." *Joint Forces Quarterly*, 1st Quarter 2009, Issue 52: 31.

⁵²Ibid

⁵³Col Larry Holcomb

⁵⁴Ibid

⁵⁵Ibid

⁵⁶General James T. Conway. *Marine Corps Vision and Strategy and 2025*.

Appendix A

Questions proposed by HQMC Quarterly Readiness Board First Quarter 2008

1. What effect have current operations had on the core (full spectrum) readiness of your units?
2. What effect have current operations had on your organization or community's ability to support contingency plans?
3. How has OPTEMPO affected training for operational staff planning? What skill sets are most degraded?
4. How does the increased combat proficiency gained in current operations carry forward into execution of your unit's core tasks?
5. What personnel and equipment sourcing practices have had the greatest negative impact upon your community's core competency training program?
6. What annual training requirements have been waived due to recent deployments? Are these events required for the core readiness of your unit?
7. Is there anything the Marine Corps can do to better sustain or regenerate core capabilities?
8. Is there enough white space between deployments to regain proficiency in core METs?
9. If the operational situation demanded core-capable units, what training venues, resources and time would your unit require to train to standard in its full core METL?
10. Should COIN/Irregular Warfare tasks (similar to OIF/OEF missions) be added to your unit's core METL? If so, how would this affect your unit's readiness to accomplish ALL core METs? What permanent fixtures (training venues, schools, etc) should be added?

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